

THE JEWS OF ITALY

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In 1938, there were approximately 45,000 Jews in Italy, 0.1% of the total population. The introduction of racism, however, raised this number to about 60,000 by categorically including as Jews all those whose two parents had been Jewish, whether they were subsequently baptized or not.

To the total number must be added more than 10,000 foreign Jews, mostly immigrants who entered from Germany, Austria, Roumania, Poland, Hungary and other East European countries after the First World War. There were also about 5,000 Jews from Turkey and Greece who lived largely in Milan, Turin and Genoa.

The census of 1931 showed that more than 85% of the Jews in Italy lived in the large cities: Rome, 14,000; Milan, 7,000; Trieste, 4,500; Turin, 3,800; Florence, 3,000; Genoa, 3,000; Leghorn, 2,000; Venice, 1,800; Fiume, 1,600.

There were between 30,000 and 34,000 Jews in the Italian colonies: Tripolitania, 22,000; Cyrenaica, 4,000; Eritrea, 300; Somaliland, 100; Dodecanese Islands, 6,000-7,000; Ethiopia, 1,000-2,000.

After the enactment of Fascist anti-Jewish legislation in 1938, the Jewish population decreased as a result of emigration or baptism, although the latter was of no legal consequence unless one parent had not been Jewish. While official statistics are not available, the total emigration may be put at 5,000 Italian Jews and 5,000 foreign Jews. Against the emigration of foreign Jews, however, should be set the immigration of several thousand Jews from Yugoslavia, who were in 1942-43 living in concentration camps or as civil internees in Italy. No statistics are available for the number of Italian Jews who were baptized as the result of Fascist persecution. Baptism seems to have been prevalent mostly among professionals and the wealthier classes; according to an estimate, it affected more than 10% of the Italian Jewish population.

Between 1938 and 1943, emigration of Jews from Italy was directed mainly towards the United States (3,000); Palestine (1,000); and Latin America (1,500). Some Jews also found their way to the French Riviera and to Switzerland.

Anti-Jewish legislation had a definite effect on the structure of the Jewish population, both from the point of view of age and of occupation. Young people, their education or careers blocked by the new laws, emigrated in large numbers.

The Jewish communities were regulated by the Royal Decree of October 30, 1930, No. 1731, which established the compulsory organization of Jewish communities in centers containing numerous Jewish groups. The communities were united in the Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane (Union of the Italian Jewish Communities), with headquarters in Rome. Each community held regular elections for its council. The president of the Jewish community in Rome in 1943 was Dr. Almansi. The Chief Rabbi was Prof. Israele Zolli (Zoller), former Chief Rabbi of Trieste.

Compulsory contributions, based on the State income tax, were levied on every Italian Jew for the maintenance of the Jewish community and its subsidiary institutions. The Communities were public corporations authorized to possess real estate, cash and securities, and to receive gifts and legacies. The councils of the Jewish communities, like those of other public corporations recognized by the State, acted under the control of the prefetto, the Chief Executive of the province. Except in a few old communities, the property owned by synagogues and other Jewish institutions and organizations was not great. Educational, religious and welfare needs were covered by the levy and voluntary contributions. Even after the reorganization of the Jewish communities according to the above-mentioned Royal Decree of 1930, financial difficulties continued to harass several localities.

As a consequence of the Royal Decree, rabbis practicing in the legally-recognized communities were authorized to perform marriages between Jews in the capacity of public officials. Marriage certificates issued by rabbis were transcribed as official papers. Like other Italian citizens, however, Jews had the right to choose civil marriage. Anti-Jewish legislation imposed no change on this procedure, except to forbid marriages between Jews and "Aryans". Before 1938, mixed marriages had become increasingly frequent (80% of the marriages recorded in Trieste in 1935-36 fell under this classification).

Being of Sephardic (Spanish) affiliation, the Jews of Italy were generally observant of the Jewish ritual. Important holidays were widely observed. Shehitah (Jewish method of slaughter) was maintained by the community. Jewish children, even when they attended public schools, were usually given a Jewish education in addition. After 1938, Shehitah was forbidden, but reports indicated that those Jews remaining within Italy who wanted to observe this ritual found it possible with the aid of bribery.

The religious freedom and civic emancipation granted the Jews with the formation of a united Italy in 1870 inaugurated a long period of Jewish participation in the activities of the country that did not come to an end with the establishment of the Fascist regime. With some Jews, as with other citizens of Italy, the Mussolini doctrines seemed for a time to promise progress for the country. Because the system of party coercion which Fascism invoked meant that Italian citizens had to be -- or make believe they were -- Fascists, there were Jews among them, and a number of these were sincere believers in the government. Massimo de Castiglioni, commander of the army garrison in Rome at the time of Mussolini's march on

the city in 1922, gave the freedom of the city to the marchers. Edoardo Polacco, general secretary of the Fascist party in the province of Brindisi and Dr. Aldo Finzi, later undersecretary of the Ministry of the Interior, also participated in the march. Other leading early Fascists were Professor Carlo Foa, who became editor of La Gerarchia, an extreme Fascist review, Dr. Maurizio Mandel and Enzo Ravenna, mayor of Ferrara until the beginning of anti-Jewish practices. A Jew named Bolaffio was one of the "martyrs" of Fascism whose tombs were transferred to the Cathedral in Florence in 1936. Another Jew, whose name was Mandolfi, was killed even before the March on Rome and is also considered a "martyr"; he is buried in Fiume. After the promulgation of the anti-Jewish laws, 724 Jewish families were declared exempt from their application as regards property because members of the family had taken part in the March on Rome, joined the Fascist party immediately after the murder of Matteotti in 1924, or were decorated or killed in the Libya war, the First World War or the two wars conducted by Mussolini in Ethiopia and Spain. Like many other Italians, many Jews were attracted to Fascism in its early stages because its doctrines included the repudiation of Italy's participation in the First World War, with the ensuing "mistreatment" of Italy by the other victorious powers.

Before Fascism, no anti-Semitic parties or organizations existed in Italy. The most flagrantly anti-Semitic paper was La Vita Italiana (Milan and Rome) which had few readers and little influence. Its editor was Giovanni Preziosi, a former Catholic priest, who first published the Protocols of the Elders of Zion in Italian in 1921, and issued a mimeographed copy of the book. Later, in 1937, government funds helped Preziosi to establish La Nuovissima, a publishing house interested chiefly in propagating the Protocols. He also issued a Spanish version for distribution in South America. The popularity of the fabrication grew overnight when the Italian anti-Jewish laws adopted after Italy joined the Axis put Preziosi and his magazine into the lime-light. Even before that, anti-Semitic trends had been in evidence among leading Fascists. After 1938, several Italian papers published anti-Semitic articles under government order or suggestion. A new magazine, La Difesa della Razza, preaching racism, was founded in Rome in 1938 by Telesio Interlandi, a newspaperman, who became Hitler's mouthpiece in racial questions in Italy. Interlandi is said to have received 14,000,000 lire from the Nazis to organize his campaign and his magazine. He was later made chief of the racial division of the Italian Ministry of Interior. Other publications which propagated anti-Jewish doctrines after 1938, and in many cases, even before, were: Il Legionario (Rome), organ of fascists abroad; Il Giornalissimo (Rome); Il Tevere (Rome); Il Regime Fascista (Cremona); Popolo d'Italia (Milan) and Quadrivio (Rome).

The acknowledged leader of the Italian anti-Semitic politics was Roberto Farinacci, a former secretary of the Fascist party. Farinacci was surrounded by a group of political profiteers who grabbed the spoils and occupied the positions formerly held by Italian Jews. In the United States the best known Italian anti-Semite was Domenico Trombetta, owner and editor

of Il Grido della Stirpe; he was interned and deprived of his American citizenship.

The Catholic clergy did not commit itself openly or clandestinely to any anti-Jewish policies in Italy. After 1938, Catholic priests were in several instances known to have helped Italian Jews. The Vatican itself set a precedent by admitting to the Pontifical Academy several Italian Jewish scientists dismissed from Italian universities. Obviously, this support of the Catholic clergy was intended to encourage the conversion of the Jews. The process of "Aryanization" of converted Jews was often abetted by Catholic priests, who seem to have supplied ante-dated baptismal certificates to be used as evidence of "Aryan" descent.

Before 1938, Italy did not have extra-legal or de facto anti-Semitic discrimination. With the exception of a few clubs frequented by the old aristocracy, Italian Jews were welcome in practically all social strata.

Official discrimination against Italian Jews, as legalized by the laws of 1938-39, followed the Nazi pattern. Laws excluding Jews from every phase of public life were vigorously applied in Italy. The laws depriving the Jews of their real estate property (Royal Decree, November 17, 1938, #1738), were not actually enforced until much later. The extent of the confiscations was not known. Frequently, Italian Jews were protected by the intervention of Italian non-Jewish friends, in whose favor the title was changed. Sometimes, customary bribery helped. It is hard, however, to judge how far this sort of protection could be carried on under the new conditions created by the war.

As a consequence of the anti-Semitic laws, the Italian Jews were practically segregated from the rest of the population. However, judging from the attacks printed in the fascist papers against fair Italians, one is inclined to conclude that the segregation had its exceptions.

Before 1938, the attitude of Italy toward stateless Jews was friendly. After 1938, those who did not succeed in leaving within the time limit of six months, were either confined to concentration camps or made civil internees (in small localities). The chief concentration camps were near Naples. Treatment was comparatively humane; as far as is known, there were no cases of murder. A report in the middle of 1943 stated that 16,000 Jews of all nationalities had been moved from concentration camps in the South of Italy to the North.

From the occupational point of view, anti-Jewish legislation brought a real revolution in the composition of Italian Jewry. Jews were practically excluded from professions which characterized them: from the legal profession, from the practice of medicine, from the direction or trusteeship of commercial or industrial enterprises, from employment in several lines of business (i.e. books, magazines, etc.), from teaching in government or government-controlled universities or schools. (Royal Decrees September 5, 7, November 15, 1938. Also Royal Decree, November 17, 1938, #1738.) According to official statistics published in 1938, there had been 100 Italian university professors of Jewish extraction.

Only lawyers of Jewish extraction who obtained "reclassification" were admitted to the bar. Reclassification was accorded for achievement in pro-Fascist politics or distinguished service in one of Italy's wars: (World War I; Ethiopian or Spanish campaigns). Even such admission, however, was of ephemeral character, because Jewish lawyers were barred from cases of special importance, or cases involving government or government-controlled agencies. Jewish lawyers, whose names were included in a special roll, could continue to plead for Jewish clients. Jewish physicians, in 1942-43, could treat only Jewish patients. They were allowed also to treat non-Jewish patients in an emergency; "emergencies" were therefore arranged to cover almost every case in which a non-Jewish Italian wanted to remain under the care of his Jewish doctor.

Several Jews who were forced to relinquish control of important commercial firms preferred to sell them; obviously the terms of sale were not favorable to the sellers. It does not appear, however, that special organizations were created for the "Aryanization" of all categories of enterprise. The Ente di Gestione e Liquidazione Immobiliare (Institute for the Administration of Immovable Property) handled the transfer of real estate owned by Jews to "Aryan" or "Aryan"-dominated corporations.

After 1938 only minor clerical jobs were left open to Italian Jews, no matter how high their training, skill and previous experience; the retention of even these posts depended on the good-will and generosity of the employers.

Before 1938, there was no discrimination against the Jews in either the Italian Army or the Italian Navy; Jews held high posts in both, especially in the Navy. After 1938, no Jew was allowed to remain in service (Royal Decree, December 22nd, 1938, #2111). Admirals Ascoli and Moroni were both dismissed with the introduction of the anti-Jewish law; Admiral Sinigaglia had been retired only a few years before. A few irreplaceable technicians were later re-admitted into the services, possibly after baptism or "documentation" of "Aryan" descent.

Jews have long participated in the federal and local governments of Italy. At the time of the March on Rome, there were 11 Jews serving as deputies and 10 as senators. Jews were active in all phases of the municipal governments. For many years before 1930, the master of ceremonies for the Governor of Rome was a Jew named Levy; it was only after the conclusion of

the Lateran Treaty that the presence of a Jew as the arranger of various ceremonials involving high Catholic dignitaries began to seem strange enough to provoke his friendly dismissal. In 1938, the promulgation of the anti-Jewish laws ousted three incumbent Jewish mayors from their posts; the mayors of Ferrara and of two small cities.

Until the introduction of racial legislation, the Italian Civil Service had been open to Jews without discrimination, and Jews were found in small number in the mail, telegraph, railway and other departments. This included moderately high posts, especially in the professional fields, such as engineering. All Civil Service employees who were Jews were ousted in 1938, even those belonging to privileged Fascist families.

No special taxes on Jews seem to have been levied after 1938, nor does it appear that Italian Jews have been taxed more heavily than the rest of the Italian population. No information is available concerning the confiscation of bank deposits as such of Jews. It appears, however, that after Italy entered the war, the Fascist government conducted a survey on the property of the Italian Jews who had emigrated, as a measure preparatory to confiscation. The theory was to confiscate the property of those who might have acquired enemy citizenship, whether or not such citizenship was actually acquired.

No important banking institutions under direct Jewish control ever existed in Italy. There were a few small private banks in several Italian cities owned by Jews. The most important of these, however, had disappeared long before 1938. Generally speaking, the financial situation of the Italian Jews was not outstanding enough to make it conspicuous before the Italian public. Jews had a certain control, more technical than financial, in the most important insurance companies in Trieste.

No special limitations were imposed upon Italian Jews in the withdrawal of funds from banks beyond the usual restrictions applicable to all clients.

No special limitations were established against Jewish insurance policy-holders. The capital of Jews who had emigrated to foreign countries was blocked; this included insurance claims. Technically, this was the result of emigration, not of racial origin.

No special limitation was imposed on Jewish exporters as such. Jews, however, were barred from the management of corporations hiring more than 100 employees, or corporations working on defense contracts.

Jews were not prominent in the ownership or directorship of the general press in Italy. There were, however, a number of leading theatre, art and literary critics who were Jews, as well as sports editors. Enrico Rocca was theatre and literary critic for Lavoro Fascista, Paolo Milano, who escaped to the United States, was on the staff of Scenario. Pier Filippo Tagiuri was one of the editors of the sports paper Il Littoriale.

There was a weekly of Jewish interest published in Italian; Israel, with publication offices in Rome. The same editorial office issued a monthly review, the Rassegna Mensile del Israel, which was established about 1930. Both publications ceased to appear in 1938, with the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws.

In the public school system of Italy, before 1938, there was no discrimination against Jewish pupils. But the preponderance of Catholic religious instruction prompted the establishment of Jewish schools, maintained by the communities of Rome, Florence, Leghorn and Turin. These schools, run on a co-educational basis, covered the elementary classes. If recognized by the government, they were exempt from taxation and a government inspector assured the fulfillment of state requirements in curriculum. After the introduction of anti-Jewish laws, when Jewish school children were excluded from the general school system, these Jewish schools provided almost the only educational facilities for them. Classes were open in other cities also. Many Jews who had been employed in the public elementary and high school system joined the faculties of the Jewish schools, and there was a resulting increase in both teachers and pupils. In some cases, baptism was resorted to for the sake of continued educational opportunities in other schools, where Catholic priests were known to have admitted baptized Jewish children in defiance of government regulations. This state of affairs gave impetus to conversions among Jews after 1938 and was probably used by some priests as an inducement to gain proselytes.

The most important higher school of Jewish learning in Italy was the Collegio Rabbinico Italiano (Italian Rabbinical College), which had been established in Padua in 1829, was subsequently situated in Rome and Florence, and returned to Rome in 1932. Its student body consisted largely of Jews from other countries. Though definite information is not available, the College was probably closed during the period of anti-Jewish laws.

Italy had an elaborate and rather progressive although not too efficient system of social security (assicurazioni sociali, assicurazioni infortuni sul lavoro, etc.). No discrimination existed in the public welfare organizations against non-Catholic citizens before 1938. Catholic charitable institutions generally did not discriminate against non-Catholics, either before or after 1938.

The several relief and public assistance measures in Italy, such as family, old age, unemployment, disabled veterans', workers' compensation for accidents and occupational diseases, etc. were extended, prior to 1938, to every person entitled to them without any discrimination. No exclusion of Jewish workers as such seems to have taken place after 1938. Jewish workers and employees, however, in consequence of the anti-Jewish legislation, were excluded from every government or government-controlled job, their pensions being liquidated at the moment of their dismissal. A small number of Italian Jews seemed to be working in 1942-32 in jobs where they were classified as "indispensable" or "Aryanized." Relief or public assistance does not seem to have been denied in these cases.

To ramify general public welfare agencies, the Jewish communities maintained various public welfare institutions of their own. In 1934, for instance, 600 Jewish families in Rome, or 3,000 individuals, received aid for the Passover holiday. The existence of a Jewish proletariat in Rome, Leghorn, and Venice imposed a somewhat heavier strain on the charitable institutions of the Jewish communities in those cities. The Rome community

also offered maternity aid, which was occasionally subventioned by the government, aid to the sick, and other assistance. There was an orphan asylum and a home for the aged in the city. The Associazione Donne Ebraiche d'Italia (A.D.E.I.), the organization of Italian Jewish women, carried on various philanthropic activities of its own.

After 1933, two Hechalutz Hachsharah (Pioneer training) camps for Palestine pioneers were established, mostly for non-Italian Jewish young men and women, on land given by the Italian government. The camps were located near Florence and near Padua, respectively. The Revisionist-Zionist group maintained a marine school at Civita Vecchia, also with government support, and under the direction of a naval officer detailed by the government. All these institutions were closed in 1938. The Convegno di Studi Ebraici was a cultural organization, with groups for Jewish studies in many communities.

Italian Jews who migrated to the United States and who -- being mainly of Sephardic (Spanish rite) origin -- gathered around the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue, do not take an active part in political movements. Numerous Jews, however, participated in various anti-Fascist organizations. Among the Italian Jews who reached the United States after the inauguration of the anti-Jewish program were: Dr. Guido Bachi, Turin lawyer (New York); Prof. Bruno Foa, with the Office of Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs in Washington; Prof. Mario Forti, former professor of gynecology in Milan; Dr. Kalman Friedman, former chief rabbi of Florence (Quincy, Mass.); Edward D. Kleinlerer, journalist (New York); Prof. Enzo Rava, professor of Labor legislation in Florence (New York); Fausto R. Pitigliani, professor of economics at the University of Rome (New York); and Dr. Mario Volterra, former professor of medicine at Cagliari and Florence (New York).

Among the Jewish leaders who found their way to Palestine were Enzo Sereni, Zionist leader and brother of an active anti-Fascist; Dr. Yakir Behar of Milan, born in Constantinople but a naturalized Italian; Guido Lodovico Luzzatto, engineer; Dr. Pacifici, former editor of Israel; Chief Rabbi David Prato; Prof. Bacchi, statistician; and Prof. Cassuto, Biblical authority. Remaining in Rome were Dr. Roberto Algranati, and Arrigo Tedeschi, engineer.

The Jewish Agency for Palestine and the Joint Distribution Committee are among the Jewish organizations which may possibly work directly or through affiliated agencies in the relief and reconstruction of post-war Italy. The Italian Jewish Club of New York, the only organization of Italian emigrées abroad, may be of considerable assistance in this field, because of its connections with leading American circles and because of its complete knowledge of the Italian Jewish communities.